

Draft Virginia Outdoors Plan

PDC 18: Middle Peninsula

Introduction to PDC Area

The Middle Peninsula encompasses 1,388 square miles known as Virginia's River Country, an area of countless waterways. The region is graced with small towns and villages having easy access to the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. The rural character and rich history abound among closely-knit communities surrounded by working farms and forests. The region has a high quality of life and is captivating with water oriented living and the scenic beauty of the tidal marshes and wooded stream valleys dissecting every nook and cranny of land. Captain John Smith explored the Middle Peninsula and Pocahontas is said to have lived here. Steeped in history, tourists journey to the region seeking historic villages and opportunities to life near the Chesapeake Bay.

The Middle Peninsula economy and recreational opportunities are dependent on the region's abundant natural resources. The region offers opportunities for both the commercial and recreational harvesting of finfish and shellfish. The construction and maintenance of both pleasure and workboats, and the use of the waterways for transport and recreation are vital facets of the community. The region also has vast forests of hardwoods and softwood. Sawmills are located throughout the region, as well as Smurfit Stone Container Corporation, which produce pulp and craft paper for domestic and European markets. Tourism is one of the largest industries in the Middle Peninsula Planning District.

The Virginia Institute of Marine Science at Gloucester Point and the centrally located Rappahannock Community College provide a resource base from which the region can address water-related and resource-related management issues. Both of these schools add to the knowledge about the natural resources in this region. Additionally, they provide seminars, classes and public information on these topics. At times, educational and interpretive programs initiated by these schools increase the use of the lands and water bodies by students, citizens and recreationists.

Geographic characteristics

The Middle Peninsula Planning District is in the east-central Tidewater region of Virginia and encompasses nine local governments: the counties of Essex, Gloucester, King and Queen, King William, Mathew and Middlesex; and the towns of Tappahannock, West Point and Urbanna. The region's northern border is the Rappahannock River, the Chesapeake Bay on its eastern side, its southern border is the York River and the western border is Caroline County. The district is largely rural, with thousands of acres of valuable tidal and non-tidal wetlands, forests, pastures, rivers, streams, and embayments. The topography of these localities is typical of Tidewater, Virginia, with landforms ranging from flat, level areas to gently rolling hills up to 200 feet above sea level.

Demographics

The region's 2000 Census population was 83,684 people. The region's population grew by almost 15% during the last decade just above the 14.4 percent statewide growth rate. Gloucester and King William Counties have had the most significant changes in populations followed by Essex and Middlesex. All four counties grew faster in percent terms than the state average. Most of the growth in the Middle Peninsula is due to immigration. The population for the region is anticipated to grow to 100,100 by 2020 representing a 16% increase in growth from 2005. Less than 4 percent of jobs are farm related. Most workers are employed outside their home counties to the Richmond and Hampton Roads regions. Middlesex County's population increases by three times its base rate of 9,932 between May and October. Increasingly, Middle Peninsula pastoral images are giving way to development that is eroding the distinctive qualities that make the Middle Peninsula unique. Commitment to resource-based tourism, public access to the areas waterways and to the quality of life in the area will help maintain the Middle Peninsula's character and the economic stability of the region.

Although Gloucester is in the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission, it is also a member of the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission. For the purposes of this plan, Gloucester data and information is contained only in the Middle Peninsula region to avoid duplication.

Demand/survey findings

As indicated in the 2006 *Virginia Outdoors Survey*, the most popular outdoor activities in the region are related to the use of water resources and beaches along with walking and bicycling trails. Fishing ranked highest among the water-related recreation followed closely by swimming and boating. Respondents to the survey indicated that access to water was a definite need that is not being met adequately, especially with the numbers of tourists anticipated to increase. There is a similar deficiency in limited number of trail miles available for walking, hiking, bicycling, jogging and horseback riding. In addition, public playgrounds separate from those associated with local schools and public swimming pools were listed as desired community amenities.

As localities plan for the future to meet the outdoor recreational needs of their residents they are encouraged to include small neighborhood parks, larger regional facilities and trails linking communities and water access points. The 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey and inventory show a need for additional active recreation facilities, especially basketball courts, baseball fields and multipurpose fields for soccer and football. In addition, the Middle Peninsula remains an area with interests in recreational activities such as hunting and off road motorcycling that require a large land base. Efforts to make lands available for off-road motorcycle driving and hunting should be pursued by interest groups and the localities. Other areas of need for recreational activities include playgrounds, bicycle facilities, and access to water for boating, canoeing, kayaking, fishing and swimming. There is a particular interest in this region because of the demand for beaches to make additional beach resources available to the public. Trails, blueways and greenways linking existing recreational, historic, cultural and natural resources could increase the

number of miles of trails suitable for walking, bicycling and boating. In addition, continuing to promote and form linkages between historical, scenic and cultural resources is supported by survey results that indicate that visiting historic sites is second in popularity to walking for pleasure.

Specific needs have been identified in the Middle Peninsula region. These include:

- Additional baseball field and basketball courts.
- Large tracts of land open for off road motorcycling and hunting.
- Hiking and backpacking trails.
- Horseback riding trails.
- Outdoor swimming and beach access.
- Water access sites for fishing and boating.
- Facilities for nature study.
- Multipurpose fields for soccer and football

Outdoor Recreation

The following are general recommendations for meeting outdoor recreation needs in the region.

- Local agencies in partnership with state and federal agencies should ensure that adequate supplies of recreation and open space are provided to meet demand and that those areas and facilities are adequately staffed, funded, and maintained. A dedicated funding source for the acquisition, management and maintenance of recreation areas and facilities should be considered a priority.
- Activity user groups along with local parks and recreation departments should continue to educate outdoor recreation enthusiasts to be cognizant of the impacts they have on others to minimize user conflicts and increase economic and natural resource sustainability.
- Local, state and federal government should provide the appropriate number and venue of opportunities for the Commonwealth's population to enjoy and access outdoor environments.
- State and local parks and recreation departments should provide opportunities to learn responsible use of public lands through the teaching of *Leave No Trace* and *Tread Lightly!*
- DCR and other natural resource agencies should provide leadership by example in operations and maintenance on behalf of conservation and outdoor ethics.
- Property owners should promote management techniques that promote safe outdoor recreation environments.

Land Conservation

The land conservation maps for the region includes existing conservation land in the following categories.

- State/Federal conservation lands
- Local open space lands
- Conservation easements
- Designated historic districts and eligible historic districts

The acreages for each land conservation category are shown on the map. Future land conservation needs and direction should relate to the remaining resources that warrant protection for water quality, habitat, quality of life and economic viability of the area. Many organizations work together with localities and the region to provide an array of land conservation mechanisms (See Chapter III. Land Conservation).

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Land Trusts Operating in the PDC

Virginia Outdoors Foundation

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Friends of Dragon Run

Middle Peninsula Land Trust

APVA Preservation Virginia

Land Trust of Virginia

The 500-Year Forest Foundation

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General recommendation for land conservation include:

- All localities should continue to promote the conservation and preservation of open space through land acquisition, conservation easements, stewardship agreements, the development of agricultural and forestal districts, the outright purchase of land or any of the many open space protection strategies presented in chapter III. Land Conservation.
- As population growth accelerates development pressure, land conservation and sound land use decision-making must become prominent considerations in all land-planning efforts. Localities, state agencies, and private organizations must make deliberate decisions about how to focus and prioritize their land conservation efforts. To do so, they must develop a method of targeting conservation efforts, using green infrastructure land planning techniques, geographic information systems, local comprehensive plans, and decision support systems such as the Virginia Conservation Lands Needs Assessment.
- Meeting conservation goals will require partnerships among all agencies.
- Continue to pursue conservation of lands along Dragon Run.

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- Build partnerships between non-governmental organizations such as the Nature Conservancy and the Middle Peninsula Land Trust to identify, promote and implement regionally based conservation initiatives.
- The National Park Service Rivers and Trails Technical Assistance will assist with development of regional conservation strategy and the establishment of local mechanisms to implement a broad land conservation program in partnership with the Middle Peninsula Land Trust by developing a Middle Peninsula Land Conservation Strategy with the outcome of enhanced land conservation and stewardship of the Middle Peninsula.

Green Infrastructure

The following are regional recommendations for implementation of green infrastructure planning presented in Chapter IV.

- Local governments should take the lead in securing green infrastructure through planning tools.
- Regional and local governments should adopt and implement the green infrastructure-planning model to ensure sustainable development of their community and a high quality of life for future generations.
- Local and regional agencies and conservation organizations should receive information and education about green infrastructure planning including guidance on local zoning initiatives that lead to changes in community design and transportation systems.
- Sources of funding for local government green infrastructure initiatives should be identified and sought.

Watersheds Recommendations

- Regional and local governments should protect the management of watersheds by integrating watershed management planning with local land use ordinances and comprehensive plans through DCR's Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act land use management initiative.

Programs

The programs listed in this subsection outline recommendations related to statewide initiatives for outdoor recreation and conservation. The program areas include: Trails and Greenways, Blueways and Water Access, Historic and Landscape Resources, Scenic Resources, Scenic Highways/Virginia Byways, Scenic Rivers, Watersheds and Environmental and Land Stewardship Education.

Trails & Greenways

Trail and greenway planning initiated at the local and regional level is important for the future development of an infrastructure that promotes public health. Only a handful of local governments have a formally adopted trails plan. With only a small percentage of

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existing plans approved and integrated into the locality's comprehensive plan, there is a risk that development will continue to occur without consideration for people who want to integrate exercise into their daily routine by walking, jogging or cycling to points of interest. Each locality should develop a trail and greenway plan, bicycle and pedestrian plan, and/or green infrastructure plan incorporating trails that will be adopted as a formal component of the comprehensive plan. In the plan, an effort should be made to link existing and proposed public lands and other resources valued by the community with businesses and neighborhoods.

General trails and greenways recommendations for this planning region include:

- Local governments should have a greenways and trails component in their comprehensive plan that provides for a variety of leisure trail experiences and promotes pedestrian and bicycle transportation alternatives.
- State, regional and local governments should include funds for trail development, management and maintenance in annual capital and operating budgets, and seek creative ways to provide incentive funding for trail development.
- State, regional and local governments should strengthen the public's understanding of the connection between trails and public health and establish policies that support pedestrian and bicycle facilities in road construction and development/redevelopment projects.
- DCR should partner with Planning District Commissions to a) facilitate communications between trail providers, users, and policy makers, b) encourage the private sector to improve regional and statewide trail opportunities and support and c) focus on regional trail networks to establish a trunkline statewide trail system.
- Local and regional trail managers should provide information about their trail at trailheads, in brochures and on Web sites so that users can choose sections within their skill and capability levels.

Specific Trails and greenways recommendations include:

1. Beaverdam Park has the potential for numerous trails, including horse and mountain bike trails. The park already has four trails totaling approximately nine miles.

Blueways & Water Access

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Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority

The Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission's Public Access Site Inventory was completed in 1999. This study identified 326 potential Virginia Department of Transportation maintained road terminus points, defined as any primary or secondary road that ends in or near proximity to any tributary that could yield access to public waters. This project improves facilitates direct access to the waterways of the Commonwealth through establishments of protocols to transfer terminus points to the

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Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority (MPCBPAA), a political subdivision of the Commonwealth.

This project identified four or five significantly different terminus points and developed a protocol to facilitate the transfer of each to the MPCBPAA. Each site was analyzed to identify obstacles in determining ownership and strategies to use on the remaining 300 plus access sites have been developed. The MPCBPAA is in the process of prioritizing sites for public access and working to secure additional public access to site throughout the region.

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Beach Access general recommendations

- Cooperative agreements among localities and other agencies, as well as private landowners, are encouraged in order to meet the increasing need for public access to beaches and other water-related recreational resources.
- In cooperation with localities, state land management agencies should identify strategies to make additional waterfront resources available for public use.
- Adequate support facilities and services, such as restrooms, concessions, parking and maintenance should be a priority for existing and proposed public water and beach access areas.
- Public agencies need to acquire and/or maintain access to existing public beaches that may be jeopardized by changes in land use or development activities.

Water Trail general recommendations

- The navigable rivers of the state should be managed as water trails. Public access areas and support facilities should be developed at appropriate intervals along these rivers.
- Regional and local governments should work with state agencies to market water trails through brochures, maps, signage and the media.
- Local jurisdictions should encourage both private and public landowners to operate rest stops and boat-in-only campgrounds along water trails at suitable site locations along Virginia rivers and streams.

Incorporate the National Park Service's **Captain John Smith National Historic Trail** in local comprehensive plans as a way to further heritage and ecotourism in the region and promote stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay. Bills in the House and Senate were introduced in Spring of 2006 to designate The Captain John Smith Water Trail as the nation's first national historic *water* trail. Pending designation, this trail will open in 2007, when Jamestown celebrates its 400th anniversary.

2. Support development of the **Algonquin Trace Water Trail** on the York River.

3. Support the development of **Gloucester Water Trails**.

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4. Continue support for the **King and Queen County Heritage Gateways and Trails**.
5. Support the development of trails by the Friends of the Dragon along **Dragon Run**.
6. The lower Pamunkey River was recognized along with the Mattaponi as an American Canoe Association Recognized Water Trail in 2006. Established by the Mattaponi & Pamunkey Rivers Association, the water trail along these two tributaries of Virginia's York River features some of the last pristine fresh water paddling on the Atlantic seaboard. Continue support for the **Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers water trails** to be connected with York River water trails.
7. Support the system of **Water Trails in Mathews County**.

General water access recommendations include:

- Provide an additional 49 water access points in the Chesapeake Bay watershed in Virginia to meet the commitments of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement.
- Water access is one of the highest recreational demands in Virginia with fishing ranking 7th and boating 10th in popularity. State agencies should work with the Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority to address management options for additional public access sites, especially at previous steamboat landing locations.

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Chesapeake Bay Gateways

The National Park Service coordinates the Chesapeake Bay Gateway Program (link: <http://www.baygateways.net>) to promote a historic and environmental focus on water access. Designated Chesapeake Bay Gateways in Middle Peninsula include:

Mathews County Visitor and Information Center – Regional Information

James Mills Scottish Factor Store

Pamunkey Indian Reservation

Gloucester Point

York River Water Trail

Mathews Blueways Water Trail

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Specific water access recommendations include:

8. Support development of the **Tappahannock Waterfront Park**.

9. While there have been many changes to **Gloucester Point Beach** over the last few years, the potential remains for additional improvements. Boating and fishing access should be expanded.

10. A **public fishing lake** in Essex County is needed to meet the demand for freshwater fishing in this region.

11. Additional **public beach access** in this region is also needed. Some of the need for this type of access could be met by making small beaches available for public access.

12. Consider development of two access points on VDOT lands on the **Pamunkey River** for car top boat launching and crabbing.

13. Develop boat access to the Mathews County Court House on the headwaters of **East Creek**.

Historic and Landscape Resources

- Each locality in the region should make every effort to identify historic and archaeological resources within each jurisdiction that can be used for economic, tourism, recreational and educational benefits, and should include those resources in all local land use planning and decision-making processes to promote preservation and protection of these resources.

- Local historic attractions, historical societies, museums and other tourism organizations in the region should build partnerships with the Virginia Association of Museums, Virginia Civil War Trails, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities/Preservation Virginia, the Virginia Main Street Program and others to enhance local heritage tourism, educational and recreational offerings.

- Local governments and private organizations owning historic properties in the region should be encouraged to manage those properties effectively for long-term protection of the public trust and to maximize public benefit consistent with the nature of the historic property.

Scenic Resources

- Each locality should conduct a visual resources assessment as part of their green infrastructure inventory and mapping process. Consider using universities and other institutions to help supplement and support this effort.

- Localities should ensure that a component of their comprehensive plan provides for the protection and enhancement of scenic resources, visual character and viewsheds.

- Localities should develop corridor management plans for scenic byways, blueways, and greenways to assure preservation of the scenic quality of the corridor.

- Management of Virginia's scenic resources is linked to economic prosperity of the state as it relates to tourism and the overall aesthetic character of the Commonwealth for business, industry and residents.

Scenic Highways/Virginia Byways

Scenic roads provide leisure time experiences and connect travelers to various scenic, historic, cultural and recreational sites. Since driving for pleasure and visiting historic sites are in the top three recreational activities, these resources become a critical link for

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communities. The preservation of their inherent qualities is critical to of attractive and welcoming communities. Designation of these roads, through the Virginia Byway Program, provides opportunities for promotion and protection. Many collaborative efforts have used scenic roads to tell a significant story of our history and natural resources. These thematic trails are further discussed in the Scenic Byways subsection of Chapter VII.

Following are general and specific recommendations for scenic roads:

- Local jurisdictions should recognize and nominate scenic roads for designation as Virginia Byways.
- Local governments should partner with other state, local and professional organizations to determine implementation strategies to protect the scenic assets of byway corridors.

There are currently no designated Virginia Byways in the Middle Peninsula. On September 22, 2005, for the first time ever four new national byway designations were given to Virginia roads. The **Colonial Parkway** through James City County, Williamsburg, and York County is included in this designation. Protection of the scenic viewsheds and natural, historical and cultural resources for the corridor is critical to the continue beauty and uniqueness of these corridors and their environs. The Colonial Parkway is designated an All American Roadway as it is considered a journey through 167 years of the English colonial experience in America beginning at Jamestown. The Parkway leads first to Williamsburg and culminates at Yorktown. Along the entire route spectacular views of the James and York Rivers abound with turnouts that glimpses of the area's rich natural and cultural history.

Existing Scenic Byways in Middle Peninsula include:

State Route 17 in Essex County

State Routes 721 and 14 in King and Queen County

State Routes 642, 14, 600 and 617 in Mathews County

Potential Scenic Byways recommended for evaluation for inclusion in the Virginia Byways Program include:

14. State Route 17 in Gloucester

15. The John Smith Capture Route is a driving trail highlighting historical points of interest related to Captain John Smith's adventures in the Middle Peninsula.

Scenic Rivers

An ever-increasing awareness of Virginia's Scenic Rivers is a direct result of concerns for water quality, bio-diversity, scenic landscapes, and water quantity. River resources are a critical component for natural resource planning. In Middle Peninsula there are currently no designated scenic river segments; In order to more successfully protect river resources the following general and specific recommendations are given.

- Local government should nominate candidate streams and rivers for study and possible Scenic River designation.
- DCR should assist local governments with development of planning tools (e.g., land-use overlays, corridor management plans) that will afford special recognition and protection to Virginia's Scenic Rivers.

The following river segments have been evaluated and qualify as Virginia Scenic Rivers:

16. The **Mattaponi River** from Monday Bridge (Route 628) to the Walkerton Bridge (Route 629).
17. **Dragon Run** from its headwaters in Essex County and King and Queen County to the Piankatank River in Middlesex County and Gloucester County
18. The **Pamunkey River** from Route 614 to the Pampatike Landing.
19. The **Piankatank River** from Route 17 to the Chesapeake Bay.

The following river segments should be evaluated to determine their suitability as Virginia Scenic Rivers:

20. The **Mattaponi River** in King William County and King and Queen County from Route 628 to Monday Bridge and from Aylett to West Point.
21. The **Rappahannock River** from Westmoreland County/King George County line to the Chesapeake Bay.
22. The **Pamunkey River** from the King William County/Caroline County line to Route 614 and from Pampatike Landing to the York River.
23. The **York River** from West Point to the Chesapeake Bay.
24. **Ware River** in Gloucester County.

Watershed Resources

The Middle Peninsula is included in both the York watershed and the Rappahannock watershed. A list of watershed groups that facilitate local stewardship are listed below: [\(watershed organization list to be added\)](#).

General watershed recommendations include:

- Regional and local governments should protect the management of watersheds by integrating watershed management planning with local land use ordinances and comprehensive plans through DCR's Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act land use management initiative (omit yellow for non-Bay PDCs).

- Regional and local governments should protect the management of watersheds by integrating watershed management planning with local land use ordinances and comprehensive plans through DCR's Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act land use management initiative.

Environmental and Land Stewardship Education

Outdoor Environmental Education needs are being assessed for each region. The information about potential outdoor education facility needs will be identified in a later draft.

General recommendations for environmental and land stewardship include:

- Federal, state, regional and local agencies will provide citizens access to stewardship education and conservation resources.
- Federal, state, regional and local agencies will promote the value and benefits of outdoor experiences and their relationship to environmentally literate citizenry.

Federal Facilities

National Parks Recommendations

- Continue to develop multi-modal connections to NPS sites, as a component of an interconnected, statewide system of trails and greenways. Support efforts underway at parks such as Petersburg, Appomattox, and Richmond that are currently engaged in efforts to link battlefields, historic sites, parks, and communities.
- Work with state agencies to elevate battlefield protection in various land conservation, scenic viewshed, and heritage preservation initiatives. Utilizes partnerships to identify, prioritize, and develop strategies to protect critical resources.
- Continue collaborative efforts through the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails Program to connect people to heritage, outdoor recreation, and educational opportunities and resources.

State Facilities

State Parks

The approval of the 2002 General Obligation Bond referendum resulted in funds that benefit the entire state park system. Funds were allocated for new state park acquisitions and for the acquisition of lands adjacent to existing parks, thus providing continued protection of dwindling open space. The bond also provided funding for numerous new

facilities, improvements to existing facilities and trails, and for the development of new trails.

In accordance with Code Section 10.1-200.1 - State park master planning, master plans must be developed for new state parks prior to the implementation of any new development. Existing master plans are to be re-evaluated every five years. The master planning process requires public involvement. An advisory committee, comprised of local officials, representatives from various user groups, businesses, tourism, adjacent landowners, and others who are stakeholders in the site, convenes to participate throughout the master planning process. Public meetings are held to gain public input in addition to the presentation to the Board of Conservation and Recreation, also open to the public. Any significant change to a state park master plan or park additions in excess of \$500,000 requires public input.

State parks are listed on the Wildlife and Birding Trail. Numerous park sites participate in regional and local initiatives such as trail development and programming.

25. In Gloucester County, on the York River, 438 acres have been acquired for **a new state park on the Middle Peninsula**. This region has been recommended as a location for a state park since the 1965 plan. Additional acreage, from a willing seller or donor, is still needed to enhance the resources of the current site. Before any facility development can occur on the site, a master plan will need to be developed. In addition, funding will be needed for development and to staff and operate the park. Opportunities exist for this state park site and potential acquisitions to provide access or links to various regional trail initiatives along the York River such as the Captain John Smith Water Trail and other land based initiatives.

State Fish and Wildlife Management Areas

General recommendations for wildlife management areas include:

- The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries should continue to develop trail systems within wildlife management areas to facilitate access for nature study, birdwatching, hunting and fishing. (Specific recommendations for WMA not available at this time)

Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC)

General recommendations for VMRC include:

- Continue promotion of saltwater recreational fishing opportunities in the Commonwealth through continued construction of new reef sites, and augmentation of existing artificial fishing reef sites.

State Forests

General recommendations for state forests include:

- DOF will coordinate with, and seek the assistance of, local trail and river user organizations to develop forest trails and publish maps for each state forest as well as establish greenways and blueways for public use.

- Localities should work with DOF to stress the importance of the urban canopy and help localities set goals.
- Localities should work with DOF to demonstrate the importance of a healthy urban tree canopy and develop strategies to enhance the urban forest.

Specific recommendations for state forests include:

26. Support recreational access, trails and water access at the **Browne Tract** and the **Browne State Forest**. The Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority (MPCBPA) purchased the Browne Tract, a 274-acre site, to protect coastal resources and provide public access within the Dragon Run watershed. The MPCBPA will manage 137-acres straddling the boundaries of Essex and King & Queen Counties, while the Department of Forestry will manage the remaining 137-acres in Essex County. The Recreational use zones will geographically separate activities that have high potential for conflict and limit recreational access to conservation areas. The existing trail networks will be expanded and include a footbridge across the Dragon Run. Interpretive and directional signage will guide and educate visitors. Larger resource protection zones and special management areas will demonstrate best management practices for timber management and conservation of natural resources. Forested buffers will be retained in riparian areas, creating wildlife corridor habitat protection.

27. Sandy Point State Forest is approximately 2,000 acres and is located in King William County. Over 15 miles of graveled or dirt roads provide opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, nature study and hunting throughout the forest. In addition, there is approximately 3 ½ miles of frontage on the Mattaponi River, offering opportunities for water access and boating. The recommendation to expand recreational opportunities, road improvements for year-round vehicular access to boating and water related activities will help meet the recreational needs in the region.

28. Continue development of a demonstration model farm, and improved hunting and fishing opportunities, and expand conservation and passive recreational activities at **Zoar State Forest**.

Natural Heritage Areas

Natural Areas Bethel Beach Natural Area Preserve and **New Point Comfort Natural Area Preserve** are both located in Mathews County.

(Needs updating) The Department of Conservation and Recreation has, as of March 2001, documented 238 occurrences of 58 rare species and natural communities in the Middle Peninsula Planning District. Five species are globally rare and three are federally threatened or endangered. Sixty conservation sites have been identified in the district; only 4 (7%) have received any level of protection through ownership or management by state, federal and non-government organizations.

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DCR recommends that the 56 unprotected conservation sites be targeted for future protection efforts. The appropriate method of protection will vary with each site but may include placing the site on Virginia's Registry of Natural Areas, developing a voluntary management agreement with the landowner, securing a conservation easement through a local land trust, acquiring the site through a locality or local land trust, dedicating the site as a natural area preserve with the current owner, or acquiring the site as a state natural area preserve.

Specific recommendations:

29. Continue to pursue **conservation of lands along Dragon Run.**

Other State Properties

The following state-owned properties contain significant undeveloped land that may have potential for recreational use. Each site should be assessed, and cooperative use agreements developed where appropriate.

30. Rappahannock Community College, South Campus in Gloucester County, has 199 acres of land that should be studied for recreational potential.

31. The Virginia Institute of Marine Science could potentially provide limited access to the water, as well as offer opportunities for special interpretive and environmental education programs.

Transportation

Transportation is integral to conservation and outdoor recreation. General recommendations relating to transportation for the region include:

- Greater emphasis needs to be placed on providing alternatives to the use of private automobiles for daily activities. Transit systems, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, improved community design, as well as a change in people's attitudes toward transportation alternatives will be needed for the transportation system of the future to meet capacity needs and energy constraints. (www.vtrans.org)
- Priority should be given to eliminating potential transportation barriers for the public, and improving the linkages of recreation areas across major transportation corridors.
- Local governments should encourage the development of a permanent process for integrating the recommendations of local public health agencies and active living into all phases of land use planning.
- Support the Town of Urbanna and Town of West Point Alternative Transportation Initiatives.
- Support inclusion of bicycle routes into local comprehensive plans.

Local Parks and Recreation Departments

Four of the six counties in the Middle Peninsula are served by a parks and recreation department. The town of Tappahannock does not have their own department, but are served by the Essex parks and recreation department. According to the Commonwealth

of Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts, Comparative Report on Local Government Revenues and Expenditures, Year ended June 30, 2005, per capita spending on parks and recreation for each locality in this region was: Essex, \$17.80; Middlesex, \$2.08; Gloucester, \$22.58 and King William, \$22.99. This compares to a statewide per capita spending on parks and recreation of \$55.31, including \$85.51 from Towns, \$43.75 from counties, and \$76.45 per capita spending on parks and recreation from cities in Virginia.

General local and regional parks recommendations include:

- Localities should appoint a parks and recreation commission to provide citizen leadership with regard to parks and recreation issues and concerns. Commissions have been effective in many localities to enhance park areas and recreation programs. This is most important in localities where no parks and recreation department exists.
- Commitments to the maintenance, management, and development of local parks and recreational systems are necessary. Localities should explore alternative methods of funding, such as set-aside ordinances, fees and charges and public/private partnerships. The establishment of a “friends group,” which could possibly evolve into a “park foundation,” should be considered for the local parks and recreation department. This citizens group could be a source of volunteers, as well as a source for community support and other resources.
- Local parks and recreation departments should initiate a structured volunteer program that recruits, trains and retains volunteers, and recognizes their contributions to parks, programs and the overall quality of life in communities.
- All localities should develop and implement hiking and bicycling plans to connect parks, schools and neighborhoods. Encouraging biking and walking within the community can enhance community health and spirit.
- Parks and programs need to be accessible to special populations, including senior adults and persons with disabilities.
- Consideration by localities of the benefit of a school/park cooperative agreement could enhance use of school and park facilities. School systems and local parks and recreation departments should cooperate in the design of new or renovated facilities. In order to increase local access, localities should consider cooperative management for the recreational use of private, corporate, state or federally owned lands.
- All public playgrounds, including school and park playgrounds, should meet or exceed the guidelines established by the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission and published in the USCPSC Handbook for Public Playground Safety. All equipment should have a cushioned surface under and around it.

- Localities should explore turning abandoned landfills into new and needed parks. From Virginia Beach to New York City to Berkeley California, localities have found they can add parkland, while removing community eyesores.

http://ga0.org/ct/x7LKtNM1_RZ8/landfill_to_parks

Specific local and regional parks recommendations include:

Work with the planning district commission and the Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority to identify and develop regionally significant parklands to supplement the state and federal lands providing public recreation and natural resource protection.

32. Consider development of a community park in the **Town of West Point**.

33. Consider development of a **regional park in Gloucester County** to include soccer fields, a swimming pool and other amenities.

National Wildlife Refuges

34. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service is conducting a management plan process for the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge on the tidal Rappahannock River. It is important that appropriate public access be provided and managed at the refuge.

Private Sector

The private sector plays a significant role in providing recreational opportunities in the commonwealth. Familiarity with the *Landowner Liability Law, Code of Virginia, § 29.1-509* could encourage some landowners to enter into an agreement with a unit of government to provide public access while minimizing their liability. As many localities prepare for substantial increases in residential growth, consideration must be given for the inclusion of mechanisms within the permitting process to encourage or require the preservation of open space and the development of recreational amenities to meet communities' needs.

Participating in water-based recreation and visiting cultural sites are activities that are vital to the local economy. Therefore, the private sector could play a strong role in enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities. There continues to be a need for marinas and boat storage areas. In addition, the boating public is looking for places to go once they are on the water. Bed and breakfasts, restaurants and other accommodations and attractions that can be reached by water are in demand. Including outdoor recreational amenities enhances market desirability and quality of life. The private sector can also provide guide services for fishing and hunting and the rental of water sports equipment as well as the support of skydiving, which is gaining momentum as a popular recreational activity. There is a need to provide areas for the use of 4-wheel off-road recreational vehicles. This may be an opportunity for the private sector to make use of lands for recreation that may not be productive for other uses.

The following general recommendations are made to improve private sector provisions of outdoor recreation.

- Encourage public outdoor recreation providers to partner with multiple private sector organizations.
- Recreational use agreements and/or easements should be encouraged for private property owners providing public recreation opportunities and to make more private lands available for recreation.
- Efforts should be made by DCR and local parks and recreation departments to make existing and potential private sector providers of outdoor recreation, especially where applicable to trails and greenways development, knowledgeable about the Virginia Landowner Liability Law.
- Local, state and federal outdoor recreation providers should support corporate recognition programs and improve corporate recognition for small business willing to incorporate outdoor recreation needs in an environmentally friendly manner.